Maurice FitzGerald (c. 1105–1176)

Origin and Family

Born c. 1105. Died 1176.[1]

Father: Gerald fitz Walter (c. 1075–c. 1136) (Gerald de Windsor)
Mother: Princess Nesta (c. 1080–c. 1136) (Nesta verch Rhys ap Tewdwr, Princess of Deheubarth)
Spouse: Alice de Montgomery, daughter of Arnulf de Montgomery, Earl of Pembroke (unsupported)

Children of Maurice and Alice:[4]

1. William FitzMaurice, first Baron of Naas (died 1199)
2. Gerald FitzMaurice, first Baron of Offaly (died 1203)
3. Thomas FitzMaurice (c. 1145–c. 1213) of Connollo
4. Alexander FitzMaurice
5. Maurice FitzMaurice of Kiltrany
6. Robert FitzMaurice
7. Nesta FitzMaurice, married Hervey De Montmaurice

Maurice FitzGerald ("Maurice the Invader") was one of the leaders of the Norman/Welsh conquest of Ireland in 1169, and is regarded as the progenitor of the Geraldine dynasty in Ireland.

Maurice was uncle to the famous historian Geraldus Cambrensis, who chronicled the Irish invasion and heaped praise on his uncle for his bravery and wisdom:[5]

"A man he was, both honest and wise; and as for truth and valor, very noble and famous, a man of his word, of constant mind, and a certain bashfulness, well colored, and of good countenance, of middle stature, and compact at all points; courteous, gentle, and moderate; a patron of sobriety and good behavior; a man of few words; his speeches more full of wit and reason than of words; more wisdom he had than that of eloquence; in martial affairs bold, stout, and valiant, and yet not hasty to run headlong into any venture, but when an attempt was once taken in hand, he would pursue and follow the same."[5]

Maurice was raised in South Wales, at Carew and Pembroke Castles. In 1109, he was reportedly taken during the abduction of his mother Nesta by Owain ap Cadwgan, but was soon returned unharmed.

Many sources indicate that in 1135, Maurice married Alice de Montgomery, daughter of Arnulf de Montgomery, Earl of Pembroke. However, recently this marriage has been challenged, and is now considered "unsupported".

© Max Brian Yale, 2025

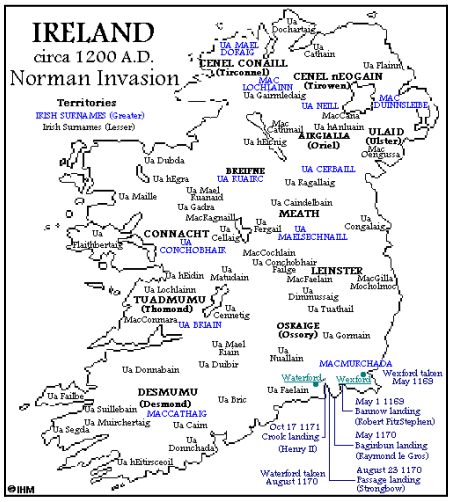
Property and the Invasion of Ireland

As a younger son, Maurice did not inherit his father's estates. He later became associated with Llanstephen in Carmarthenshire, where he rebuilt the castle after its destruction in 1137.

Following the appointment of his brother David as Bishop of St. Davids in 1148, Maurice was made steward of the bishopric, gaining lands and authority.[3]

During the period of civil unrest in England (1135–1154), he was active in military campaigns in South Wales, where Norman and Welsh forces were in frequent conflict.

In 1166, Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, sought assistance in regaining his kingdom and was authorized by King Henry II to recruit forces in South Wales. Maurice, along with his half-brother Robert FitzStephen and other Norman-Welsh leaders, joined the expedition.



FitzStephen landed in Ireland in 1169, and Maurice followed shortly thereafter with additional forces. Together with Dermot's army, they secured Wexford and advanced on Dublin.[7]

Maurice played a leading role in the campaign, including the defense of Dublin during a major siege. Despite being heavily outnumbered, the Norman forces successfully repelled the attack.

These events marked the beginning of sustained Norman involvement in Ireland.

A unique aspect of the invasion was that nearly the whole of the famous Anglo-Norman band of knightly adventurers who took part were closely related to one another, either as brothers, nephews, uncles, or cousins. The connecting link was Nesta, princess of South Wales. Because of their success, she is the ancestress of nearly all the great Anglo-Norman families in Ireland today.[8]

King Henry II sought to limit the power of the invaders and imposed his overlordship of the island. In 1172, he massed an army of 4,000 men and traveled to Ireland, meeting no resistance. Native Irish lords all quickly swore allegiance to the King and the Normans soon followed. The king appointed Maurice FitzGerald and Robert FitzStephen wardens of Dublin under the lordship of Hugh De Lacy.[8]

In 1176, King Henry granted Maurice FitzGerald the barony of Offaly, and the territory of Offelan, comprising the towns of Maynooth and Naas. He was given the castle of Wicklow in return for his share of Wexford, which had been appropriated by the King. He is credited with building the stout castle at Maynooth and starting construction of the Black Castle at Wicklow.[7]

The FitzGeralds became very powerful in Ireland. Maurice Fitzgerald was the ancestor of both the Earls of Kildare and Desmond, while his brother William obtained an immense grant of land in Kerry from the McCarthys. Together, their families and descendants became known as the Geraldines. In 1890, there were 14,700 people in Ireland with the FitzGerald surname.[2]

© Max Brian Yale, 2025

End of Life

In September 1177, Maurice died at Wexford, and was buried in the Abbey of Grey Friars. According to *The Peerage of Ireland,*[9] his death was:

> *"not without much sorrow of all his friends, and much harm and loss to the English interest in Ireland. He was a man witty and manful; a truer man, nor steadfaster for constancy, fidelity and love, left he none in Ireland."*[9]

Giraldus Cambrensis describes him with great tribute:[5]

> *"Maurice was indeed an honorable and modest man, with a face sun-burnt and well-looking, of middle height; a man well modeled in mind and body and of innate goodness; desiring rather to be than to seem good. A man of few words, but full of weight, having more of the heart than of the mouth, more of reason than of volubility, more wisdom than eloquence; and yet, when it was required, earnest to the purpose. In military affairs valiant, and second to few in activity; neither impetuous nor rash, but circumspect in attack, and resolute in defense; a sober, modest, and chaste man; constant, trusty, and faithful; a man not altogether without fault, yet not spotted with any notorious or great crime."*[5]

Maurice FitzGerald had a Coat of Arms that is similar to the Yale Coat of Arms.

Later, the FitzGerald descendants from the Desmonds modified it with the addition of Ermine tails (Argent, a saltire gules), making it effectively identical to the Yales.

Later still, the Knights of Glin, a branch of the Fitzgerald tree, added a wild boar.

© Max Brian Yale, 2025

Tracing ancestry through the coat of arms is problematic as 15th century Welsh heralds were known to retroactively apply coats of arms to later descendants and their forefathers in order to strengthen hereditary claims. So the Yale coat of arms may have been created around 1400 in an effort to link the family to the Fitzgeralds. See “Further Readings” for more information on Yale Coat of Arms.

Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: FitzGerald-5685
FamilySearch ID: GDCS-YZD
Wikipedia: Maurice FitzGerald

Further Reading:

- Yale, Max Brian. *Guide to the Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection.* 2025
- Yale, Max Brian. *Yale Family Coat of Arms* - Origin and History. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*, 2025

References

1. Yale, Rodney Horace. *Yale Genealogy and History of Wales*. Beatrice, NE: Milburn & Scott, 1908. Ref no. 4 p. 74

2. Pierse, John. Pierse Family History, 1950

3. Medieval Bendings – The Origins of the Fitzgeralds

4. The Peerage Online: Person Pages 10448 and 10469

5. Wright, Thomas, The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, London George Bell & Sons, 1905

6. Ireland’s History in Maps Online: the Cambro/Norman Invasion of Ireland. (no date)

7. Davies, John. *A History of Wales*, London, England: Penguin Press, 1990.

8. Lawless, Emily. The Story of Ireland. Produced by Juliet Sutherland et. al., 1896

9. Lodge, John. The Peerage of Ireland; Or, a Genealogical History of the Present Nobility of that Kingdom. Vol. 1. Dublin: James Williams, 1789.

© Max Brian Yale, 2025